

 **Elizabethan Drama:**

**\*An introduction to the Elizabethan Drama**

**\*William Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* as a case study**

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***Elizabethan Drama***

**Course description:** Elizabethan drama is a course that focuses primarly on highlighting the role played by the latter as a turning point in the history of English Literature. At the stage, the student should be able to distinguish between the various dramatic periods and their features.

The emphasis is going to be directed towards an overview of the Elizabethan drama, its characteristics and themes, and its influence on other dramatic ages. As Shakespeare’s works are viewed as canons during the Elizabethan era, we will refer to *Hamlet* as a case study.

**Objective:** The course’s main purpose is to enrich the student’s literary background and to introduce him/her to one of the most remarkable eras in English Drama.

**Course Delivery:**

The course will consist of a mixture of teacher-led and student-oriented styles (presentations). There is background reading for each session and student presentations are normally scheduled accordingly following completion of each major theme.

**Outline:**

1. An introduction to the Elizabethan Age and Renaissance.
2. A close reading of Elizabethan Drama and its features.
3. Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* as a case study:
* The play and the Elizabethan Drama.
* Reading the dramatic techniques.
* Tone and Genre
* The appearance of the ghost
* Madness
* Commenting on the contentious themes within the umbrella of the Elizabethan drama: Madness/ Dichotomies/ Art

**General Introduction**

**Overview:**

English Renaissance theatre, also known as [early modern](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Early_modern) English theatre, or (commonly) as Elizabethan theatre, refers to the theatre of [England](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/England) between 1562 and 1642.

This is the style of the plays of [William Shakespeare](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Shakespeare), [Christopher Marlowe](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christopher_Marlowe) and [Ben Jonson](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ben_Jonson). It is considered to be the most brilliant period in the history of English theatre

*English Renaissance theatre* encompasses the period between 1562 and 1642. The phrase *Elizabethan theatre* is used at times improperly, especially in languages other than Englishto mean *English Renaissance theatre*, even though in a strict sense this only applies to 1603. Strictly speaking one distinguishes within *English Renaissance theatre* between [*Elizabethan*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elizabeth_I_of_England)*theatre* from 1562 to 1603, [*Jacobean*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James_VI_and_I)*theatre* from 1603 to 1625 and [*Caroline*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_I_of_England)*theatre* from 1625 to 1642

**Politics and Religion**

Elizabeth began her reign in a fast changing and dangerous period for the English nation. Elizabeth’s father, Henry VIII, had broken off from the Catholic Church and established the Protestant Church of England. After the death of Henry and his sickly son Edward the throne had passed on to Elizabeth’s older sister Mary, a Catholic - who had brought England back into the Church of Rome, and had married the firmly Catholic King of Spain.

When Mary died without children the Protestant Elizabeth inherited the throne and England became a Protestant Nation once more. Each stage in this process involved bloody trials and executions of those following the wrong religion - and Elizabeth had to consider the fact that a large proportion of her population had been or still was Catholic. While some Catholics continued their religion secretly and otherwise supported Elizabeth, others were openly rebellious.

Elizabeth was excommunicated by the Pope who encouraged all Catholic Kings and subjects to work to assassinate Elizabeth and overthrow her regime. Elizabeth managed to resist the Northern Rebellion - where Catholic Lords and subjects in the North rose up against her - and escaped a number of planned assassination attempts. She also fought off the Spanish Armada, an invasion force blessed by the Pope.

In times such as these, plays, which gathered huge crowds and exposed them to a particular view of the world - which could be an excellent form of propaganda - were viewed with a great deal of concern. This is hardly surprising since a single performance at a playhouse could attract 3000 spectators when the population of London was only 200,000. This meant that one and a half percent of the London population were gathered in one place and exposed to the same influence at every performance - enough people to begin a riot or even a rebellion. To protect against these threats, the Elizabethan authorities imposed a range of laws and systems to ensure that they could control just about every word that was spoken onstage.

More typical of the censorship of Elizabethan plays was the suppression of *Sir Thomas More* - a play which was written and then amended by a large group of different playwrights, possibly including Shakespeare - who may have written scenes in his own handwriting in the manuscript. It was an odd choice of a subject for a play, since Thomas More was a Catholic Martyr who had been executed by Elizabeth’s father for opposing his divorce and establishment of the Church of England.

**The British Renaissance:**

\*It was a [cultural](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cultural_movement) and [artistic movement](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Art_movement) in England dating from the late 15th and early 16th centuries to the early 17th century. It is associated with the pan-European [Renaissance](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Renaissance) .

\*As a cultural movement, it encompassed innovative flowering of Latin and vernacular literatures, beginning with the 14th-century resurgence of learning based on [classical](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Classical_antiquity) sources, which contemporaries credited to [Petrarch](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Petrarch), the development of linear [perspective](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Perspective_%28graphical%29) and other techniques of rendering a more natural reality in [painting](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Painting), and gradual but widespread [educational](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_education) reform.

\*In all, the Renaissance could be viewed as an attempt by intellectuals to study and improve the [secular](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Secular) and worldly, both through the revival of ideas from antiquity, and through novel approaches to thought.

\*The characteristics of Renaissance were humanism, nationalism, a new approach to life, and a new spirit in art, architecture, literature and learning, the growth of the vernaculars, and scientific investigation.

\*The Renaissance stood for humanism, the sympathetic and devoted study of mankind, instead of the theological devotion of the Middle Age. The Renaissance scholars were known as "humorists" and their subjects of study, came to be called the "humanities

\*The rise of the rational spirit and of scientific investigation gave rise to a new approach to life. Whereas the medieval approach was one of absolute conformity and obedience, the new approach was based on reason. It laid emphasis on the importance of critical examination and evaluation of ideas and principle.

**Major Features of the Elizabethan Drama**

Along with the economics of the profession, the character of the drama changed towards the end of the period. Under [Elizabeth](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elizabeth_I_of_England), the drama was a unified expression as far as social class was concerned: the Court watched the same plays the commoners saw in the public playhouses. With the development of the private theatres, drama became more oriented towards the tastes and values of an upper-class audience. By the later part of the reign of [Charles I](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_I_of_England), few new plays were being written for the public theatres, which sustained themselves on the accumulated works of the previous decades.

Costumes were often bright in color and visually entrancing. Costumes were expensive, however, so usually players wore contemporary clothing regardless of the time period of the play. Otherwise, costumes would be recycled and used in multiple different plays multiple times until it was too worn to be used. Occasionally, a lead character would wear a conventionalized version of more historically accurate garb, but secondary characters would nonetheless remain in contemporary clothing.

The growing population of London, the growing wealth of its people, and their fondness for spectacle produced a dramatic literature of remarkable variety, quality, and extent. Although most of the plays written for the Elizabethan stage have been lost, over 600 remain.

The men (no women were professional dramatists in this era) who wrote these plays were primarily self-made men from modest backgrounds. Some of them were educated at either [Oxford](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/University_of_Oxford) or [Cambridge](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/University_of_Cambridge), but many were not. Although [William Shakespeare](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Shakespeare) and [Ben Jonson](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ben_Jonson) were actors, the majority do not seem to have been performers, and no major author who came on to the scene after 1600 is known to have supplemented his income by acting.

[**Genres**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genre) of the period included the [history play](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_play), which depicted English or European history. [Shakespeare](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Shakespeare)'s plays about the lives of kings, such as [*Richard III*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_III_%28play%29) and [*Henry V*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henry_V_%28play%29), belong to this category, as do [Christopher Marlowe](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christopher_Marlowe)'s [*Edward II*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edward_II_%28play%29) and [George Peele](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_Peele)'s [*Famous Chronicle of King Edward the First*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Famous_Chronicle_of_King_Edward_the_First). History plays dealt with more recent events, like [*A Larum for London*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A_Larum_for_London) which dramatizes the sack of [Antwerp](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Antwerp) in 1576.

[**Tragedy**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tragedy) was an amazingly popular genre. Marlowe's tragedies were exceptionally popular, such as [*Dr. Faustus*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Doctor_Faustus_%28play%29) and [*The Jew of Malta*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Jew_of_Malta). The audiences particularly liked [revenge dramas](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Revenge_play), such as [Thomas Kyd](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_Kyd)'s [*The Spanish Tragedy*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Spanish_Tragedy). The four tragedies considered to be Shakespeare's greatest ([*Hamlet*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hamlet), [*Othello*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Othello), [*King Lear*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/King_Lear), and [*Macbeth*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Macbeth)) were composed during this period, as well as many others (see [Shakespearean tragedy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shakespearean_tragedy)).

[**Comedies**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Comedy_%28drama%29) were common, too. A sub-genre developed in this period was the [city comedy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/City_comedy), which deals satirically with life in London after the fashion of [Roman](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theatre_of_ancient_Rome) [New Comedy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_Comedy). Examples are [Thomas Dekker](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_Dekker_%28poet%29)'s [*The Shoemaker's Holiday*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Shoemaker%27s_Holiday) and [Thomas Middleton](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_Middleton)'s [*A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A_Chaste_Maid_in_Cheapside).

Though marginalised, the older genres like [pastoral](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pastoral) ([*The Faithful Shepherdess*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Faithful_Shepherdess), 1608), and even the [morality play](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Morality_play) ([*Four Plays in One*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Four_Plays_in_One), ca. 1608-13) could exert influences. After about 1610, the new hybrid sub-genre of the [tragicomedy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tragicomedy) enjoyed an efflorescence, as did the [masque](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Masque) throughout the reigns of the first two [Stuart](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/House_of_Stuart) kings, [James I](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James_I_of_England) and [Charles I](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_I_of_England).

Of the three types of plays recognized in the Shakespeare [First Folio](http://www.shakespeare-online.com/biography/shakespeareinprint.html) -- Comedies, Histories, and Tragedies -- the last has been the most discussed annnd is clearest in outline.

1. Tragedy must end in some tremendous catastrophe involving in Elizabethan practice the death of the principal character.

2. The catastrophe must not be the result of mere accident, but must be brought about by some essential trait in the character of the hero acting either directly or through its effect on other persons.

3. The hero must nevertheless have in him something which outweighs his defects and interests us in him so that we care for his fate more than for anything else in the play. The problem then is, why should a picture of the misfortunes of some one in whom we are thus interested afford us any satisfaction? No final answer has yet been found. Aristotle said that the spectacle by rousing in us pity and fear purges us of these emotions, and this remains the best explanation. Just as a great calamity sweeps from our minds the petty irritations of our common life, so the flood of esthetic emotion lifts us above them.

In the drama of [Marlowe](http://www.shakespeare-online.com/biography/shakespearecontemps.html) the satisfaction appears to depend, not on the excitement of the catastrophe, but on the assertion of the greatness of man's spirit; and this seems to have been the theme also of [Senecan tragedy](http://www.shakespeare-online.com/plays/hamlet/senecadrama.html). It will be remembered that the first part of *Tamburlaine* ends, not in his death, but in his triumph, and yet we feel that the peculiar note of tragedy has been struck. We have the true tragic sense of liberation. [Kyd](http://www.shakespeare-online.com/playanalysis/revengetragedy.html) also asserted the independence of the spirit of man, if he is prepared to face pain and death.

**Theatrical Conditions in Elizabethan England**

Shakespeare is the best known of all of the Elizabethan Playwrights.  Other writers of the period include Thomas Kyd,[Christopher Marlowe](http://dlibrary.acu.edu.au/staffhome/siryan/academy/author%20pages/marlowe%2C%20christopher.htm), Ben Jonson, John Fletcher, and John Webster. Plays were usually performed in outdoor theatres in the afternoon. Poorer audience members were required to stand for the duration of the performance while wealthier people could sit in elevated seats. Often writers worked under the patronage of significant courtiers or wealthy noblemen. Experimentation with the English language led to the rise in favour of Blank verse (which is unrhymed iambic pentameter).

The theatrical conditions of the period were such that companies flourished. During the period 1585-1642 there were typically two companies performing in London (and sometimes up to four companies).  The population of London was only about 200,000 people so theatre companies often struggled to maintain audiences.

Performances took place six days a week and plays commenced at 2pm. Typically a different play was staged each day.  A new play would be introduced into the repertoire every seventeen days.  Individual plays normally only had about ten performances before they were dropped from the repertoire.  This meant that playwrights were in high demand. Most plays were not published during the writers' lifetimes.  Indeed, there was little consideration of reading the plays.  Plays were for performance.

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| **ELIZABETHAN TRAGEDY**  Closely connected with the historical plays was the early development of Tragedy. But in the search for themes, the dramatists soon broke away from fact, and the whole range of imaginative narrative also was searched for tragic subjects. While the work of Seneca accounts to some extent for the prevalence of such features as ghosts and the motive of revenge, the form of Tragedy that Shakespeare developed from the experiments of men like Marlowe and Kyd was really a new and distinct type. Such classical restrictions as the unities of place and time, and the complete separation of comedy and tragedy, were discarded, and there resulted a series of plays which, while often marked by lack of restraint, of regular form, of unity of tone, yet gave a picture of human life as affected by sin and suffering which in its richness, its variety, and its imaginative exuberance has never been equaled. |
|   The greatest master of Tragedy was Shakespeare, and in Tragedy he reached his greatest height. “Hamlet,” [2](http://www.bartleby.com/60/203.html%22%20%5Cl%20%22noteXXXXVIIIFN2) “King Lear,” [3](http://www.bartleby.com/60/203.html%22%20%5Cl%20%22noteXXXXVIIIFN3) and “Macbeth” [4](http://www.bartleby.com/60/203.html%22%20%5Cl%20%22noteXXXXVIIIFN4) are among his finest productions, and they represent the noblest pitch of English genius. Of these, “Hamlet” was perhaps most popular at the time of its production, and it has held its interest and provoked discussion as perhaps no other play of any time or country has done. |
|   This is in part due to the splendor of its poetry, the absorbing nature of the plot, and the vividness of the drawing of characters who marvelously combine individuality with a universal and typical quality that makes them appeal to people of all kinds and races. But much also is due to the delineation of the hero, the subtlety of whose character and the complexity of whose motives constitute a perpetual challenge to our capacity for solving mysteries. “King Lear” owes its appeal less to its tendency to rouse curiosity than to its power to awe us with an overwhelming spectacle of the suffering which folly and evil can cause and which human nature can sustain. In spite of, or perhaps because of, its intricacy of motive and superabundance of incident, it is the most overwhelming of all in its effect on our emotions. Compared with it, “Macbeth” is a simple play, but nowhere does one find a more masterly portrayal of the moral disaster that falls upon the man who, seeing the light, chooses the darkness. |
|   Though first, Shakespeare was by no means alone in the production of great tragedy. Contemporary with him or immediately following came Jonson, Marston, Middleton, Massinger, Ford, Shirley, and others, all producing brilliant work; but the man who most nearly approached him in tragic intensity was John Webster. “The Duchess of Malfi” [5](http://www.bartleby.com/60/203.html%22%20%5Cl%20%22noteXXXXVIIIFN5) is a favorable example of his ability to inspire terror and pity; and though his range is not comparable to that of Shakespeare, he is unsurpassed in his power of coining a phrase which casts a lurid light into the recesses of the human heart in moments of supreme passion. |

**Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* (1602)**

***Hamlet and the Elizabethan theatre:***

*Hamlet* especially incorporated all revenge conventions in one way or another, which truly made *Hamlet* a typical revenge play. "Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is one of many heroes of the Elizabethan and Jacobean stage who finds himself grievously wronged by a powerful figure, with no recourse to the law, and with a crime against his family to avenge."

During the time of Elizabethan theater, plays about tragedy and revenge were very common and a regular convention seemed to be formed on what aspects should be put into a typical revenge tragedy.

In all revenge tragedies first and foremost, a crime is committed and for various reasons laws and justice cannot punish the crime so the individual who is the main character, goes through with the revenge in spite of everything.

The main character then usually had a period of doubt , where he tries to decide whether or not to go through with the revenge, which usually involves tough and complex planning.

 Other features that were typical were the appearance of a ghost, to get the revenger to go through with the deed. The revenger also usually had a very close relationship with the audience through soliloquies and asides.

The original crime that will eventually be avenged is nearly always sexual or violent or both. The crime has been committed against a family member of the revenger. " The revenger places himself outside the normal moral order of things, and often becomes more isolated as the play progresses-an isolation which at its most extreme becomes madness."

 The revenge must be the cause of a catastrophe and the beginning of the revenge must start immediately after the crisis. After the ghost persuades the revenger to commit his deed, a hesitation first occurs and then a delay by the avenger before killing the murderer, and his actual or acted out madness.

The revenge must be taken out by the revenger or his trusted accomplices. The revenger and his accomplices may also die at the moment of success or even during the course of revenge. It should not be assumed that revenge plays parallel the moral expectations of the Elizabethan audience.

**The Genre:**

 \*Hamlet isn't just any tragedy, it's a classic [revenge tragedy](http://research.uvu.edu/mcdonald/britquestions/revenget.html).

\*The play introduces a new understanding to tragedy in Drama.

\*The genre goes beyond being stylistic to be cognitive.

\**Hamlet* celebrates the Shakespearean invention: The duality of thought and action.

\*Tragedy in *Hamlet* uses revenge to reveal the complexity and the intersection between the inner world and the out world.

## The tone: Dark, Uncertain, Introspective, Tortured

Aside from the oh-so-hilarious gallows humor of the gravediggers and a few other really-not-so-funny moments, Hamletis a dark play full of uncertainty and suspicion. From the very first line, "Who's there?" (1.1), we're dumped into a world of uncertainty, anxiety, and the very real possibility of ghosts.

When Hamlet delivers all those introspective and tortured soliloquies about mortality, betrayal, and the futility of life, he brings us into his tortured world view—and only lets us out with his death. Nice.

**The Appearance of the Ghost:**

What is the ghost? What does it want? Where has it come from? Is it a "spirit of health or goblin damned" (1.4.40)? And did someone remember to bring the ice?

We just don't know for sure. But here's what the spirit claims: (1) The ghost says he's Hamlet's father (it sure looks like the guy); (2) The ghost also says that he was murdered by his brother, who happens to be Hamlet's uncle Claudius, the guy who's now married to Gertrude and sitting on the throne of Denmark; (3) The ghost also claims he's "doomed" to suffer in "sulph'rous and tormenting flames" until the "foul crimes done in [his] days of nature / Are burnt and purged away" (1.5.9-13). Hm, sounds a lot like Purgatory, where sins had to be "purged" before a soul could make it to heaven. (That also sounds like a no on the ice.)

But there are a couple of hitches. First, purgatorial spirits weren't supposed to ask people to commit murder, since that basically defeats the point of being purged of your sins. Still, that's exactly what the ghost wants. In fact, he says he's doomed to suffer until he gets his revenge.

Second, Protestants don't officially believe in the doctrine of Purgatory and Hamlet is a Protestant. (He lives in Denmark, a Protestant nation, and goes to school in Wittenberg, where the Protestant Reformation began. Be sure to check out our discussion of "[Religion](http://www.shmoop.com/hamlet/religion-theme.html)" for more about this.) Pretty suspicious, if you ask us. Hamlet seems to agree, and he's not about to go on a murdering spree until he knows the truth. The ghost's appearance sets the revenge plot into motion, but it also delays the play's action.

A lot of literary critics notice that the ghost has a whole lot in common with young Hamlet. They talk alike (mostly about Gertrude's "unnatural" and "incestuous" relationship with Claudius) and they also kind of look alike at one point. Remember when Ophelia describes the way Hamlet appeared when he showed up in her room looking all ghostly "pale," almost "as if he had been loosed out of hell" (2.1.83)? Yeah, sounds a lot like the ghost to us.

So maybe the ghost-as-dad is just a figment of Hamlet's imagination. Other characters may see the ghost (the castle guards and Horatio, for example), but Hamlet's the only one who has a dialogue with it. He's also the only one who sees or hears the ghost when it shows up in Gertrude's chamber to remind Hamlet to be nice to his mom (3.4.111-116.1).

Has Hamlet been imagining his conversations with the ghost the whole time? Does this have anything to do with the fact that Hamlet says to Horatio "My father! —methinks I see my father [...] in my mind's eye" (1.2.184,185.2) before he even finds out that the ghost has been appearing on the castle walls?

Regardless of whether or not we believe the ghost is "real," we feel safe saying that the spirit represents the way young Hamlet is haunted by his dad's memory. We get it; the prince has just lost one of the most important figures in his life, a man he idolizes and loves, and everyone is just telling him to move on and forget about his father. Claudius insists Hamlet's excessive grief is "unmanly" and Gertrude tells Hamlet to ditch his mourning clothes and quit moping (1.2.69-73).

**Madness in *Hamlet*:**

In the play the only persons who regard Hamlet as really mad are the king and his henchmen, and even these are troubled with many doubts. Polonius is the first to declare him mad, and he thinks it is because Ophelia has repelled his love. He therefore reports to the king that "Your noble son is mad" (II. ii. 92), and records the various stages leading to his so-called madness (II. ii. 145-150). No sooner, however, has he reached this conviction than Hamlet's clever toying with the old gentleman leads him to admit that there is method in Hamlet’s madness.

Though it suits the king's purpose to accept this pronouncement of Polonius, he is never quite convinced of its truth. His instructions to his henchmen, "Get from him why he puts on this confusion" (II. i. 2), imply that he understands it as pretence and not real lunacy. He soon admits that Hamlet's actions and words do not indicate madness but melancholy:

Ophelia's view that Hamlet has gone mad for love of her is of no value on the point. She is herself, rather than Hamlet, "Like sweet bells jangled out of tune, and harsh." (III. i. 158.) The poor distracted girl is no judge of lunacy, and knows little of real sanity. She cannot enter into the depth of his mind, and cannot understand that it is her own conduct that is strange and incoherent.

Hamlet's madness was really feigned. He saw much to be gained by it, and to this end he did many things that the persons of the drama must construe as madness. His avowed intention was to throw them off the track. To understand the madness as real is to make of the play a mad-house tragedy that could have no meaning for the very sane Englishmen for whom Shakespeare wrote.

There is dramatic value in such madness as Lear's, for the play traces the causes of his madness, and the influences that restore him. Shakespeare never makes of his dramas mere exhibitions of human experience, wise or otherwise, but they are all studies in the spiritual life of man.

His dramas are always elaborate attempts to get a meaning out of life, not attempts to show either its mystery, or its inconsequence, or its madness. If Hamlet were thought of as truly mad, then his entrances and his exits could convey no meaning to sane persons, except the lesson to avoid insanity.

**Dichotomies in H*amlet*:**

1. **The Natural and the Unnatural**:

\*Shakespeare is the son of nature.

\*The playwright sheds light on the controversy between what is natural and cultural.

\*The text shows the difference between revenge and Justice.

\*Time is problematized.

\*Memory is one of the themes that Shakespeare tests its validity.

\*Shakespeare investigates the issue of Appearance and being with a dramatic lucidity.

 2) **Death and Life**:

\*The idea of circularity is generously questioned in Hamlet.

\*The text problematizes life as it is viewed as futile and absurd.

\*The question of time and memory is critically introduced.

\*Death and Life are about TO BE OR OR NOT TO BE: Existentialism.

\*Shakespeare investigates, through death and life, various interconnected dilemmas mainly: HEROISM/ JUDGEMENT/ GRANDEUR AND IMMORTALITY.

**Art in *Hamlet***:

\*The difference between the French and the English genius.

\*Art as genuine, natural, and spontaneous = TRUTH

\*Mise en Abime (the play within the play) as an intelligentsia in dramatic literary works.

\*Art is about mimesis and verisimilitude.

\*The Shakespearean invention celebrates Immortality and Eternity through and in Art.